

Redwood Needles



Summer 2021

Sierra Club Redwood Chapter

Volume 63, No. 3



Water (or lack thereof) is on our minds

On the Path

a note from
Chapter Director Jeff Morris

As we begin to collectively wend our way out of a global pandemic, there are many calls for getting things back to “normal” and hopes of renewal and a reset. While that’s certainly a hopeful perspective, it is more likely that as a society, locally and globally, we’ll still be living with viral events in the near term and into the foreseeable future.

The same can be said of climate conditions in the Redwood Chapter territory, and the greater world.

One of the key impacts is drought. While there has been a lot of press about California “re-entering” drought conditions, it seems like a more rational argument to say that any variance from the previous drought conditions from four years ago have now realigned themselves. Public policy, unfortunately, is not completely following along.

Unlike the aphorism that “rain follows the plough,” the false harbinger sales pitch that drove on the dustbowl conditions of the 1930s, drought and wildfire conditions are sadly linked. Like so many other results of climate change, they also have a more profound impact on the most vulnerable communities.

During the last eight months, our Redwood Chapter activists have been involved in elevating all of these combined issues, externally, through webinars on the impact of wildfires and need for defensible space and home hardening in addition to our combined work with the Loma Prieta and San Francisco Bay chapters on sea-level rise impacts in the San Francisco Bay Area.

The work is internal, as well. Through collaboration with the SF Bay Chapter, we have conducted workshops on equity and inclusion and how we can be better allies for all vulnerable populations on any issue, including climate. The workshop series has ended, but we will continue to work on implementing strategies and ideas to make sure Redwood Chapter is as inclusive and representative of all the diversity in our geographically expansive region.

While there are challenges ahead, especially around wildfires as we enter what is expected to be a significant fire season, there is also reason for hope that we are facing these challenges with new perspectives and renewed energy that will help support our fellow community members here within the Redwood Chapter and beyond.



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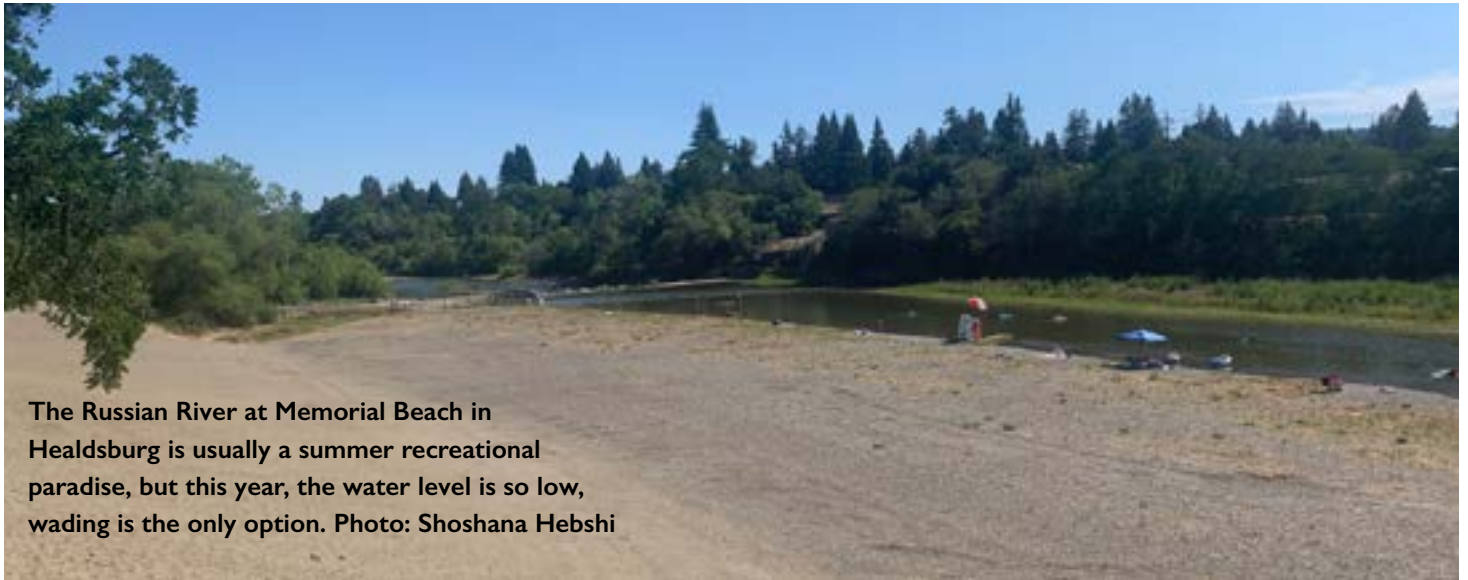
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It's Not a Drought

Water 'abundance' is gone as we adjust to the new water supply



The Russian River at Memorial Beach in Healdsburg is usually a summer recreational paradise, but this year, the water level is so low, wading is the only option. Photo: Shoshana Hebshi

By Shoshana Hebshi
Chapter Communications Coordinator

It's no secret that we are in a severe water crisis. Exploring waterways throughout our region will find rivers and streams quite low. This time of year, the Russian and the Eel rivers would normally be recreational attractions. Seasonal creeks would be rippling through stone-laden corridors. But this summer, we see our reservoirs and lakes, like Lake Sonoma and Lake Mendocino, at shockingly low levels that expose banks so eerily it's nearly desert-like. All life that has been supported by the flows is at critical risk.

Agencies and jurisdictions are delivering notifications to curb water use. The City of Santa Rosa has asked its residents to cut back by 20 percent. On June 7, the Healdsburg City Council declared a local drought emergency and implemented Stage 3 water restrictions to achieve a 40 percent systemwide reduction in water demand by establishing residential water allowances and commercial business reduction goals. Well owners along the Russian River, including small, food-producing farms, have received Emergency Regulation Notices from the Department of Water Resources.

While we as individual water users

can (and should) certainly take more personal responsibility for reduction, there's another story brewing that turns a sharper lens on agricultural and industrial water use and how these operations figure into the water equation.

Of course, agriculture needs water

'We have to be in it for the long haul. This is not a blip' — Rue Furch

to grow crops, raise animals and operate production facilities. And industrial water use is necessary for the functioning of our economy and infrastructure. But how much? Can water regulators do more to rein in excess or illegal use so the water is shared more equitably?

Rue Furch, a member of Redwood Chapter's executive committee, wears many hats, including serving on the Advisory Committee for the Santa Rosa Plain Groundwater Sustainability Agency. She holds historic knowledge about local water issues, and she relies on a well on her rural Sebastopol property.

"My perspective is that we need to use less and store more," she said. "Everyone could do a little more to conserve, but it is absolutely necessary to take a broad look at everything that

needs to happen."

Furch, also active in the Sonoma County Water Coalition, emphasized that this is a complex issue with a lot of moving parts to get to sustainable solutions. But "people must be a part of the solution or there is no solution. That includes everyone: businesses, farmers, residents... everybody."

These solutions include better monitoring and greater understanding of water usage. For example, some agricultural ponds that store water from rains and/or diver-

sions are required to drain the ponds before the season when the water is most needed.

Solutions also must include validated data on the amount of water used by industries, including the wine industry, and curtailing illegal diversions of water upstream that prevent rightful access for downstream users.

As water becomes scarcer and rates increase, however, we will see changes occur, like the closing of the McClure Dairy in Point Reyes this summer. Owner Bob McClure, whose family has been operating a dairy on Point Reyes National Seashore for four generations, cited water shortages as the main factor driving his decision to sell his organic cows to an out-of-state buyer and shut down his farm.

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Redwood Chapter Executive Committee

The executive committee is the governing body of the chapter, with one (1) member delegated by each of six (6) regional groups and six (6) members elected at large. Each group elects its own executive committee. The chapter ExCom meets every-other month in either Santa Rosa or Willits. The meetings are being held over Zoom during the Covid-19 pandemic.

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TALKIN' TRASH

Methane reduction via green waste diversion is underway

By Theresa Ryan

Sonoma Group Zero Waste Chair

Despite legislative attempts to delay implementation of SB 1383, a statewide bill passed in 2016 to set methane emissions reduction targets, Zero Waste Sonoma, also known as Sonoma County Waste Management Agency, is moving forward to implement the policy countywide.

SB 1383 aims to reduce short-lived climate pollutants (SLCP) by curbing organic waste disposal and divert edible food from landfills.

According to Calrecycle, methane, though a short-lived pollutant, is 84 times more powerful than CO₂ and a major contributor to climate change. It is emitted through organics, like food scraps, yard trimmings, paper, and cardboard, which make up half of what Californians dump in landfills.

Calrecycle says reducing SLCPs like organic waste will have the fastest impact on the climate crisis.

SB 1383 mandates that 50 percent of organics need to be diverted from the landfill and 75 percent by 2025 from 2014 levels. The law also requires at least 20 percent of edible food be recovered before it hits the landfill; subsequently, it has to be distributed to food recovery programs.

Another benefit of not wasting edible food is related to water conservation, which becomes increasingly important with evolving drought conditions. Water is used to produce food, and water and energy are involved in transporting and disposing of wasted food. So, SB 1383 potentially is an environmental trifecta: climate mitigation, food insecurity and water/energy conservation.

Zero Waste Sonoma is considered a leader in the state for its success and momentum with SB 1383.

ZWS is tackling part of the food recovery piece of the law by using the Food Waste Prevention and Rescue grant it was awarded from Calrecycle to expand food recovery infrastructure that will result in diversion of 705,000 pounds of food and a reduction of 561 metric tons of CO₂ over two years.

ZWS has also identified more than 500 businesses involved in food generation, such as commercial food distributors, grocery stores, schools and wholesale food vendors that will need to donate their excess food.

A recent setback to the local enactment of SB 1383 is that Renewable Sonoma, a proposed composting facility, did not receive funding to go forward, and local green waste will continue to be trucked out of the county to be processed.

CLIMATE CORNER

Whose drought is this?

By **Randy MacDonald**

*Chair, Redwood Chapter Climate & Energy Committee
Co-Chair, Climate Protectors*

The historically dry conditions throughout most of California and across the American West are technically referred to as a “drought” by the National Weather Service. But in a recent editorial, the *L.A. Times* said we need to start calling this what it really is:

“There is no drought. That phrase is sometimes used to deny the epic and obvious change in our climate patterns, but that’s all wrong. Just as there is no temporary drought in the Sahara, where heat and dryness punctuated by flash flooding is the norm, there is no temporary drought in California.”

Perhaps we need to ask ourselves instead, “Whose climate change is this?” Does climate change belong to those who suffer its impacts? That would include every one of us, and indeed it is true: We cannot escape the increasingly dire conditions spreading across our planet as a result of global warming.

But climate change also belongs to all those who contributed to it, because this is a human-caused climate emergency.

Every one of us has had some part in generating the greenhouse gases which are heating the Earth’s oceans, dry lands and atmosphere.

It’s true that certain people have polluted more than others, but none of us cannot escape our own responsibility for our part of the climate crisis.

There is a third group to whom this climate change belongs: People who rise up and take meaningful steps to reverse global warming. Yes, we are victims, and we are also perpetrators of our climate crisis, but we have the ability and moral obligation to do something about it. I call these people “Climate Protectors,” and I invite you to join us!

Our climate crisis is not going to solve itself. Every one of us must do all we can in our personal lives

to eliminate our carbon footprint, and we must work with others locally and beyond to bring about real climate solutions. The importance of mass action by everyone

Climate change belongs to all those who contributed to it, because this is a human-caused emergency.

to whom this climate crisis belongs cannot be overstated. Our coordinated action leads to political power, which we must exercise while there is still time to ensure a livable planet.

The scale of the changes needed to decarbonize human society by the middle of this century are daunting indeed. But look a young person in the eyes and then try to tell me that we are not up to this challenge, a challenge we ourselves created.

This is our drought. This is our climate crisis.

Visit climateprotectors.net and become a Climate Protector today!

Solutions to diminished water supply are plentiful if we all work together

Continued from Page 3

“It’s going on all over,” Furch said.

One potential solution being explored is desalination. The practice has been growing in popularity in California, especially in the southern region, and it is coming north. Yet, this solution is energy intensive and may not be appropriate to implement.

And yet another solution water authorities are exploring, Furch said, is aquifer injection. By injecting excess water in the rainy season or from another source, into an aquifer, the water table can be replenished. But there’s a risk of contaminating the underground water due to chemical interactions that may not be predictable, and more research will be necessary.

Vineyards and other types of agriculture need to transition to more drought-tolerant crops or dry farming, and many of them have, Furch said. And, she added, “We have

to think about plants that are part of the solution. Tree roots provide routes for water into the aquifers. They become little flow channels. We have to stop cutting down trees that are part of the solution for groundwater recharge. Greater awareness of the value of ‘Slow it, Spread it, Sink it,’ should lead to smart land use policies in recharge areas, and protection of soils where agriculture could thrive.”

Northern California water “abundance” will be a thing of the past as dramatic changes in rainfall and hotter weather brought on by impacts of climate change affect our seasons. Furch said this drastic shift in how we view water will change our behavior out of necessity.

“We have to be in it for the long haul. This is not a blip,” she said, adding that everyone has to be part of the solution. “We have to acknowledge that this is how it is. Don’t use the word ‘drought.’ This is weather. This is how it is. We have to get real with that.”

The next big step in protecting our public lands

By **Victoria Brandon**
Chair, Redwood Chapter

I've been fascinated with the natural world ever since I was a child paddling about on the Rippowam River in Connecticut among the sunfish and snapping turtles. Since landing in Lake County 40 years ago, most of that passion has been focused right here in northern California. It's been a great privilege to advocate for Wild and Scenic Cache Creek, the Boxer/Thompson Wilderness Bill, Mt. Konocti County Park, the Berryessa Snow Mountain National Monument, and others. Now I'm excited to campaign for a new bill that will benefit millions of Californians from remote Del Norte County to the San Gabriel Mountains.

Wilderness proponents in California had good reason to rejoice earlier this spring, when Sen. Alex Padilla (D-CA) introduced the Protecting Unique and Beautiful Landscapes by Investing in California (PUBLIC) Lands Act. This ambitious legislation will protect some of the state's iconic landscapes as designated wilderness or wild and scenic rivers; expand equitable access to nature for communities that need it most; improve wildfire protections; and promote the outdoor recreation economy.

The legislative package consists of three bills that passed the House of Representatives earlier in the year, including one bill that affects landscapes in my very own Redwood Chapter. Rep. Jared Huffman's (D-CA) Northwest California Wilderness, Recreation, and Working Forests Act would designate 262,000 acres of pristine federal lands as wilderness; permanently protect more than 480 miles of wild and scenic rivers; establish a 700,000-acre special restoration

area in the South Fork Trinity River and Mad River watersheds; and require federal agencies to coordinate fire management, all without limiting recreation access or affecting private property.

This legislation will help achieve the goals set forth in Gov. Gavin Newsom and President Joe Biden's executive orders to protect 30 percent of our lands and waters by 2030 (an effort known as 30x30). California is currently in the process of putting together a statewide plan on how to implement this goal, and Sierra Club believes passing the PUBLIC Lands Act is key to our state achieving it.

Passing the bill would be a milestone victory for Californians. By expanding protections to include more than a million acres, the bill will increase equitable access to the outdoors, like in the Los Angeles area, where an expanded San Gabriel Mountains National Monument will connect nearly 17 million people to the region's largest green space. The bill establishes new tools and protocols to protect the landscapes that were devastated by wildfires last year. And expanded access to the outdoors will help boost California's economy. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, California's outdoor recreation economy generated more than \$57 billion in revenue and supported more than 578,000 jobs. Increased access to protected wilderness could push those numbers even higher.

Local conservationists have prioritized some of these special places for a long time, but political considerations made permanent protection unachievable during previous rounds of wilderness legislation in 1984 and 2006. That changed after the 2010 census with the creation of a new Second Congressional District, now represented by Huffman,

a long-time environmental champion.

Starting not long after the 2012 election, a broad stakeholder group led by the Wilderness Society and the California Wilderness Coalition worked to define boundaries, identify outstanding natural features, and hold discussions with neighboring private landowners, federal agencies, and local tribes as part of the "Mountains and Rivers" campaign.

With the support of the Sierra Club, Huffman's legislation was consolidated with three other California bills and two bills from other states, creating a package that easily passed the House in February 2020 and was then attached to the House version of the must-pass National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). Unfortunately, some of the public lands provisions did not make it into the final version of the NDAA. When the new Congress convened in 2021, however, the bills found a new champion in Sen. Padilla.

This is the best opportunity we've had in at least a generation to permanently protect these lands—and the clock is ticking. The expanded protections included in the PUBLIC Lands Act are essential not only for protecting lands, water, and wildlife and expanding equitable access to the outdoors. They will also bring mental and physical health benefits to our communities, create healthier and safer landscapes and environments for all, and build up the natural infrastructure we need to take on the climate crisis and the extinction crisis.

My 20 years as an environmental advocate have been deeply rewarding, and I'm particularly looking forward to popping the cork on a bottle of good champagne when the PUBLIC Lands Act becomes the law of the land.

Chapter & Group leadership elections

The Redwood Chapter and Group Executive Committee election season has begun. Nominating Committee Chairs have been selected, and candidate recruitment is proceeding.

Three Chapter At-Large seats will be up this year, and either three or four Group seats. If you are interested in running for a position, please contact the relevant nominating committee chair.

NOMINATING COMMITTEE CHAIRS

- **Chapter Elections Chair:** Jim Horn, jhorn@hornengineers.com
- **Lake Group:** JoAnn Saccato, shylila@clueemail.com
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- **Solano Group:** Joe Feller, joe56feller@gmail.com
- **Sonoma Group:** Shirley Johnson, johnsons@sonoma.edu
- **North Group:** Ned Forsyth, nedforsyth48@gmail.com

ELECTION SEASON DEADLINES

- **Aug. 20:** Chapter and Group candidate slates are complete and submitted to Elections Committee Chair Jim Horn.
- **Sept. 6:** Deadline for submission of candidate statements for publication in the Fall *Redwood Needles*. Deadline for submission of ballot petitions to the Election Committee Chair.
- **Oct. 4:** Ballots and candidate statements are published in the Fall *Needles*, and voting begins in both hard copy and electronic formats.
- **Dec. 31:** Voting closed. All votes must be in.

Reducing car mileage one step in taking climate action

By Shoshana Hebshi

Chapter Communications Coordinator

"If Sonoma County is to reach carbon neutrality by 2030, an action that we most certainly must take is to reduce our driving by 5 percent or more each year, over the next nine years," according to Sierra Club Transportation Chair Steve Birdlebough.

Birdlebough described this goal during Sonoma County's April 6 Climate Action and Resiliency Town Hall, organized by the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors.

Cars and trucks are responsible for more greenhouse gas emissions than any other part of the economy, according to California's Air Resources Board.

It has been known since Senate Bill 375 was enacted in 2008 that curbing greenhouse gas emissions from vehicles will require more than a shift to battery-powered cars. While electric vehicles somewhat reduce the environmental impact of driving, production of batteries adds significant greenhouse gases to the planet, and all vehicles cause road wear and tear, which requires greenhouse gas-intensive repairs.

Communities can help reduce driving by making new and existing development less dependent on automobiles. Locating services in every neighborhood enables people to walk, bike or take public transportation rather than driving.

Birdlebough outlined four major ways to reduce driving without harming the economy:

1. Focus growth in walkable urbanized areas.
2. Expand a safe and attractive network of bike and pedestrian routes.
3. Create seamless, transportation systems with easy connections of all modes.
4. Shift heavy goods movement from trucks to trains.

"There is a silver lining in all of these changes: we won't be investing money in construction of many new roads, nor will we be

paying to widen many existing roads," he said. "And with all of us driving our cars and trucks less and less every year, the county's budget for pothole repair may finally begin to catch up with the need for upkeep."

In the state budget, Gov. Gavin Newsom has allocated some added funding for bike and pedestrian pathways, as well as other "active transportation" activities. However it is recognized that such funding needs to increase further to meet the demand for significant improvements to make biking and walking more convenient and safe, and Birdlebough urges us to "put pressure on the legislature to get more funding."

Other ways for individuals to be proactive is to think about which trips can be made by foot or by bike, and to leave the car parked as much as possible.

"Buy a bicycle if you don't already have one. Maybe it's electric, so if you have to go up a hill, the motor kicks in and makes it easier to ride," he said.

"Be open to a grocery store or more high-density housing coming to your neighborhood to create more walkable areas and prevent urban sprawl. Get familiar with public transit routes and set a goal to reduce your driving by 5 percent this year. If you drive 10,000 miles a year, aim for 9,500 miles this year, and 9,000 the next."

Change is coming, Birdlebough says, as the climate crisis makes it imperative that we alter our behavior more quickly than in the past. "There's a change of thinking among the public works people and at the state level. It's getting easier to reduce speed limits, so the tools are beginning to be available and the thinking is going in the right direction. And we need to move the needle faster than it's been moving."

If you are interested in being more active in transportation issues, please volunteer with our transportation committee.

For more information, contact us at redwood.chapter@sierraclub.org



Redwood Chapter supports Climate Trekkers

Youth activists marched 266 miles from Paradise to San Francisco in June to put pressure on lawmakers to support the Civilian Climate Corps as part of the Green New Deal. Redwood Chapter and its Sonoma and Solano groups helped along the way by providing food and encouragement. Chapter activist Shirley Johnson (pictured front row center) met up with the marchers in Petaluma where she and three other volunteers reflected on "how cool it was to lovingly prepare their meal!"

"The marchers are good people with a look of determination," Johnson said. "These young people are our future, and I feel confident they will continue to make this planet a better place."

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RAISE YOUR VOICE

Help Hold PG&E Accountable for its Negligence

Join us to demand that PG&E stops ravaging our trees and instead invests in modern infrastructure that will greatly reduce wildfire risk. State leaders must hold PG&E accountable for its negligence.

We have launched a petition to show state leaders that their constituents care about this issue and do not want to see PG&E continue to devastate healthy trees, impose on private landowners and neglect to quickly update its antiquated infrastructure as we face another fire season.

Sign the petition here:

[https://addup.sierraclub.org/campaigns/
hold-pge-accountable-for-infrastructure-failure-in-wildfires](https://addup.sierraclub.org/campaigns/hold-pge-accountable-for-infrastructure-failure-in-wildfires)

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